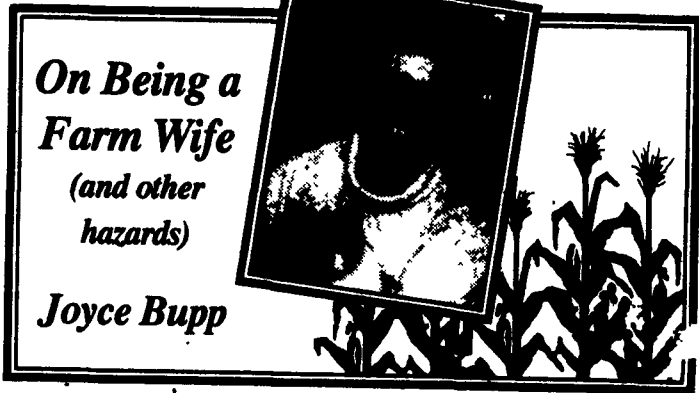


Bring In Herbs Before Frost



I'm confused. But then, as my family would probably tell you, it doesn't take much...

For the umpteenth time in the last two months, fallen leaves are piling up around the house. They've been tumbling for weeks now, ever since the Sahara-Desert weather set in back there in August. Raking leaves? In August? And, they didn't turn golden yellow like our maple leaves normally do in late October—just shriveled up and plopped to the ground. Heat stroke, no doubt.

By mid-September, we went digging under an accumulation of those sickly-looking leaves for a few leftover pieces of firewood. An early start-up of the woodstove was needed when overnight temperatures shivered down to the low-forties. Our shaded, dampness-prone, brick house took on all the welcoming warmth and coziness of a cave.

A couple of days and a half-inch of rain later, the lawn was greasing up like it does in April. And the drought-victim lawn mower, out of use so long it's slow-leak tire had gone totally flat. Before tending to the tire, The Farmer dumped the load of firewood he had hauled in from the woods on the front-end loader tractor, against continuing hints of near-frosty mornings.

My pansy seedlings are sturdy and thrifty, the young geraniums started from seed have just begun to bloom, a small row of string beans is full of blossoms—and the tomato plants have cheerfully pushed out a whole new generation of growth. And I'm potting up all sorts of little surprise volunteer seedlings turning up around the flower beds, like impatiens and wax begonias.

Is it fall that looks like spring, or spring when the calendar says fall? I'm not the only one

confused.

A few weeks ago, our dwindling guinea flock (two) tripled when a friend donated four of the noisy birds residing on his farm. However, his four newcomers and our two long-time residents shunned associating with each other. Birds of a feather do not always flock together—regardless of what you've heard.

Our two long-timers hang out around the house and calf barns, screaming and screeching their way to roost in the old barn every evening about calf-feeding time—so they're easy to track. The four new guineas, however, are more shy. They homesteaded around the tall, grassy areas near the pasture pond, and manure lagoon. I rarely saw them.

But apparently, they're confused by what season it is, too. Three weeks ago, they collectively hatched out more than a dozen chicks. Chicks? In September? Guineas normally hatch in early summer.

"Have you seen the guinea chicks lately?" asked The Farmer about a week after the reported hatch. Fact was, I hadn't seen them at all, just heard about them.

"The foxes must be at it again," he guessed. Just a few weeks before, I'd watched two beautiful foxes hunt through a newly-cut hayfield below the house, on a bright, sun-washed morning. Brazen foxes have come right into the back yard more than once to snag a nesting guinea mother and her babies.

But a few days later, he spied the flock of 15 brown-stiped, orange-legged chicks and three guarding adults, scratching around on the dirt field road. The one guinea still missing we speculated might be standing tight somewhere on another nest.

Yesterday, I discovered a hand-

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.)—There are quite a few herbs we enjoy growing that are considered tender perennials which means in plain English that they will not overwinter. Herbs such as sweet marjoram, scented geraniums, lemon verbena, coriaca mint, lemon grass, pineapple sage and rosemary are a few of the "tender" perennial herbs that need to be repotted or dug from the garden and brought in for the winter. If the herb was planted in the garden, cut back the root system as well as the top by about one-third so that there will be minimal shock when bringing it inside.

When you cut back the herb to bring inside try making stem cuttings about 2 to 4 inches long so that you have something to fall back on if the mother plant doesn't survive. Make a stem cutting by cutting about 1/4 inch below a node (where the leaves are attached to the stem). It is suggested to use a rooting hormone with a fungicide added because it encourages quicker rooting, a healthier root system and it helps you sleep better nights knowing you done your best. When repotting your herbs, choose a container only slightly bigger than the root system and use a sterile, soil-

less mix instead of garden soil. Often, herbs brought inside suffer from inadequate light, high home temperatures and low humidity. To remedy this problem, consider growing your herbs under florescent lights that you have put on a timer for 12-16 hours of light per day. Rosemary is a very difficult herb to overwinter because it needs cool temperatures and is unforgiving if you forget to water it. Most homes during the winter months are too warm, the humidity is too low and the light is minimal; so growing under lights is a very desirable option.

Fall Is For Planting

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.)—Although trees and shrubs can be successfully planted just about anytime if done correctly, planting in the fall gives the plants certain advantages. When trees and shrubs are planted in the fall, the roots are able to begin to become established without a lot of demand from the tree canopy for water and nutrients. Woody plants are not putting on growth above, but sending manufactured carbohydrates down to the roots for winter storage. The roots will continue growth until the ground freezes much later in the season. Thus the roots get off to a good start before the demand of new spring growth is upon them.

Many of the tree-planting techniques practiced in the past have been found to be detrimental to tree health. Deep, highly amended planting holes have resulted in sunken plants with trapped roots, leading to early decline of the tree. Current recommended practices include a planting hole that is wide as opposed to deep—with a minimum of 3 times the diameter of the rootball; loosening and mixing existing soil without adding amendments; setting the tree on solid ground in the center of the planting hole at the same depth as

it was planted in the nursery, or, in the case of heavy, clay soils, an inch or two above the soil line. In this case, build up the soil to the root collar. Apply two to four inches of mulch to cover the entire prepared area. Do not put mulch within 6-8 inches of the tree trunk. Water newly planted trees once a week, thoroughly soaking the

entire planting area. Remove any trunk wrapping or protective tape, unless the tree's bark has been broken or disturbed. Only if needed, stake the tree with a flexible wood or metal stake so it can bend with the wind. Use a small section of rubber inner tube to hold the tree for the first six months.

Fall Garden Clean-Up

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.)—After seeking that last bit of production out of the vegetable garden, don't forget to do those last few chores that will make getting started again next year somewhat easier. Remove any diseased plant material from the garden. Most disease organisms overwinter quite nicely on garden debris and if left and tilled in will provide plenty of inoculum for next year's crop. Can diseased plant material be composted? If you maintain a hot compost, most disease organisms will be killed. The compost should reach a temperature of 140 degrees F in order to accomplish this. Clean plant debris may be left in the garden and tilled in to increase organic matter in the soil. A rough fall tilling is often a good idea. Winter freezing and thawing action will break down the large soil clods somewhat. Fall tilling also allows for better drainage and is helpful in getting into the garden a little earlier in the spring fol-

lowing the snow melt. This is also a perfect time to have your garden soil tested. A soil test will show you exactly what nutrients need to be added to your garden, and adding them in the fall allows the nutrients to be fully incorporated. Soil test kits can be purchased at your county cooperative extension office.



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